

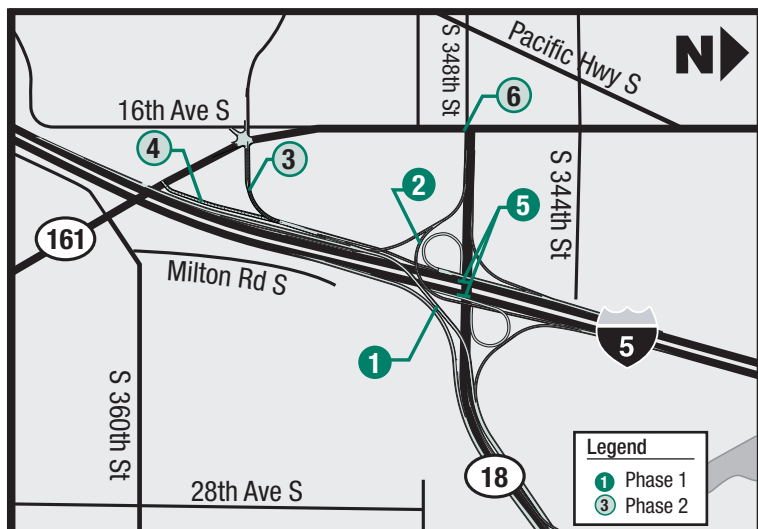


Washington State
Department of Transportation

Triangle Newsletter

Winter 2007

I-5 - SR 161/SR 18 Triangle Project Update



Regional growth in South King and North Pierce counties has contributed to capacity and safety problems in the area of this interchange in Federal Way. In 2003 and 2005 the Washington State Legislature recognized the importance of finding a solution and endorsed the project's development by providing funding through added gas tax revenues for this and other vital projects. The Triangle project is a regional priority to improve capacity and freeway connections for cars and trucks and to enhance access and safety in the area of the interchange. The Washington State department of Transportation (WSDOT) will construct the project in phases.

What has happened over the last year?

The project update you received in March 2005 presented the preferred alternative for addressing traffic and safety issues in the Triangle area. Subsequently, WSDOT held an open house in March 2005 to get feedback on the proposed design, and received comments that helped improve it. Throughout the past year and a half WSDOT conducted traffic and environmental studies to determine effects the project may have on the environment. Since we have found no substantial negative effects from the project, our partner, the Federal Highway Administration, advised us a NEPA Environmental Assessment would no longer be necessary. The project now moves forward with a NEPA Documented Categorical Exclusion and a SEPA checklist to document the project's compliance with Federal and State environmental laws. This means saving time and money for the project. We have taken a number of steps over the last two and a half years to get to this milestone, and have:

- Held a public workshop and conducted interviews with local communities and businesses to get feedback on conceptual alternatives
- Selected a design for further environmental analysis and held an open house to get public comments
- Secured \$100 million of additional funding through the Transportation Partnership Account
- Conducted a Value Engineering Study with various transportation experts to streamline the proposed design
- Conducted detailed study and assessment of the project's cost estimate to account for current construction market conditions
- Coordinated project permitting needs with resource agencies and identified potential mitigation sites
- Obtained critical right-of-way through an early property acquisition process for willing sellers

What does the proposed design look like?

The design for the project replaces two of the existing cloverleaf loop ramps with direct access flyover ramps, and increases the number of lanes where there are high traffic volumes. Project features will improve current conditions by:

- 1 Replacing the existing single-lane northwest loop ramp with a new two-lane flyover ramp for westbound SR 18 to southbound I-5 traffic

- 2 Replacing the existing southeast loop ramp with a new direct-access flyover ramp for eastbound SR 18/South 348th Street to northbound I-5 traffic
- 3 Providing direct access for southbound I-5 to southbound SR 161 traffic via two new ramps at South 356th Street and South 359th Street
- 4 Providing direct access for westbound SR 18 to southbound SR 161 traffic via new ramp at South 359th Street
- 5 Reducing accidents along I-5 by eliminating adjacent loop ramps and constructing auxiliary lanes to improve merging areas
- 6 Alleviating traffic congestion at the South 348th Street/SR 161 intersection by removing a significant number of left-turn movements resulting from the new SR 161 ramps

Will WSDOT build the entire project at once?

WSDOT's most recent estimate to complete the Triangle Project is between \$215 and \$235 million. Available funds total \$112 million, meaning WSDOT will have to build the project in phases. In Phase 1 WSDOT will "fix the worst first" by eliminating weaves on I-5 and building new connections between SR 18 and the freeway. Other improvements will need additional funds and will require voter approval of transportation initiatives such as the Regional Transportation

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